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SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR ELECTION UPDATE: DECEMBER 12

REF: SAN SALVADOR 1360

¶1. Summary: This message is an update regarding the Salvadoran municipal and legislative elections scheduled for January 18, and the presidential elections scheduled for March 15. This report includes additional information on the test of the electoral results reporting system, results of two latest polls, and campaign themes.

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ELECTORAL TEST REVEALS MORE TECHNICAL FAILURES  
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¶2. Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) President Walter Araujo said December 10 that the electronic data transfer system which will be used to report election results has several weaknesses, including technical problems (reftel) and poor interagency coordination. In addition, some of the 253 Transmission Centers (CDTs) failed to operate when Ministry of Education officials did not open schools where voting centers are located or because TSE personnel did not attend the drill.

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WAR ON POLLS HAS BEGUN  
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¶3. In a December 10 press conference Hato Hasbun, Advisor to FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes, and Mark Fierstein, from Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, revealed poll results in which Funes (47 points) leads (pro-U.S., center-right) Nationalist Republican Alliance Party (ARENA) presidential candidate Rodrigo Avila (35 points) by 12 points.

¶4. Salvadoran President Antonio Saca announced that the war on polls has begun. He said that three different Central American research companies, that better know the field, have information that favored Avila. He said the FMLN has spent too much time in promoting poll results, but in a real election what matter are votes.

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LEGISLATIVE POLLING RESULTS REVEAL CLOSE RACE  
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¶5. Mitofsky Public Opinion Research polling results released December 10 indicate a dead heat for Legislative Assembly seats in San Salvador. Polling shows the FMLN with 33.9 percent and ARENA with 32.9. The polling shows similar results in Cabanas, with ARENA receiving 29.3 percent and the FMLN 28.4 percent. In La Libertad, ARENA (37.3) leads the FMLN (23.3) by 14 points, and in Cuscatlan ARENA (31.4) leads the FMLN (26.3) by 5.2 points.

¶6. In Chalatenango, the FMLN (28.5) leads ARENA (26) by 2.5 points. However, in La Paz, ARENA (35.5) leads the FMLN (24.7) by 10.8 points, and in San Vicente ARENA (28) leads the FMLN (25.3).

¶7. On December 11, Mitofsky revealed results for the western departments of Ahuachapan, Santa Ana, and Sonsonate. In Ahuachapan, ARENA (35.1) leads the FMLN (21.1) by 14 points; in Santa Ana ARENA (31.3) leads the FMLN (24.8) by 6.5 points; in Sonsonate, ARENA (28.6) leads the FMLN (26.3).

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CAMPAIGN THEMES

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18. The Solidarity Force, a group that is reportedly financed by ARENA sympathizers, has launched TV advertising comparing FMLN candidate Funes and the FMLN to the presidents of Nicaraguan and Venezuela. The ad says that when Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega offered change to Nicaraguans it resulted in poverty, unemployment, and corruption. The ad also claims that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez finances the FMLN campaign, and accuses FMLN leaders of celebrating after the 9/11 attacks. (Note: Some FMLN sympathizers did.)

GLAZER